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Seven panels on preservation: Ruminations of a one-eyed fat man

Phillip Austin

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Arts and Sciences
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SEVEN PANELS ON PRESERVATION:
RUMINATIONS OF A ONE-EYED FAT MAN

BY

Phillip G. Austin

July 1995

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PREFACE

This work is an exploration of the ideas of decay and dissolution versus that of preservation, in particular the issue is of preservation, as the need we have and the struggle in which we engage in resistance to those forces.

Degradation is an essential element of those cycles of nature to which we are all subject and of which we are all a part. There can be no regeneration without degeneration. Man, as a cognizant being, unlike the other creatures with whom we share this world, is endowed with the capacity for an awareness of this process which is intellectual rather than instinctive. We are, therefore able to look toward the future either with anticipation or dread and prepare for an assumed role in it. As well, we may look to the past and to those who have gone on before and preserve some of their spirit or knowledge to take forth with us.

At issue especially, is our comprehension of our place in this struggle and the danger of technological arrogance which might lead us to believe that we may somehow exempt ourselves from these processes.

This work was produced as an adaptation of Dalle de Verre, a 20th century stained glass technique, in which, traditionally, large roughly cut pieces of glass are assembled in a matrix of concrete or an epoxy/silica mixture.

A special thanks to my wife, Peggy, for her support and patience and to Tim Rodrigo, for his encouragement and moral support.

TO
ANTHONY DOMACHOWSKI
AND
ROBERTA DOMACHOWSKI

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THESIS PROPOSAL

I propose to use an adaptation of the Dalle De Verre process to produce relief units, incorporating found and fabricated glass components. These reliefs may be used as individual works or as panels which can function as part of architecture, furniture or sculpture. The subject matter for these will be drawn from my human experience and responses to the fabrication process.

Thesis Proposal for the masters of Fine Arts Degree

College of Fine and Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology

Title: Untitled as yet

Submitted by: Phil Austin

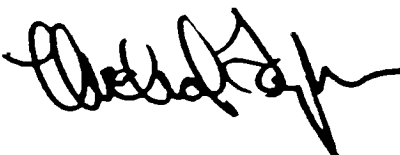
Date: September 24, 1991

Thesis Committee:

Chief Adviser: Micheal Taylor

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Departmental Approval:



Date: 9-20-91

Approval, Special Assistant
to the Dean for Graduate Affairs:

Date:

Computer needs other than word processing:

Yes _____ No _____

Explain need of equipment:

Committee Approval: _____

I. Introduction

"You are not dead so long as someone is still wearing your clothes."

That is at least not according to a good friend of mine, who formulated that theory having spent a good deal of time at auctions and estate sales. It is a contemplation of what happens to people in our society after they have passed on, a different twist on immortality. The importance of material goods and wealth in our culture has become so great that for many their identities and sense of personal worth are not only expressed in but derived from the things which they own. So it is that ones' "stuff" may be his only legacy to the future.

At any rate, we all leave a lot of "stuff" behind when we go. The whole of human society is composed of and built upon the "stuff" left behind by those who come before us. Unlike the simpler animals who have as their legacy only the genetic information which drives their instincts, we have the ideas, represented in the architecture, art and writings of our ancestors, preserved and available for our use, to be used, added to, and preserved for future generations. So if we change the phrase to read "You are not dead so long as someone is still using your stuff" or "ideas" the statement is perhaps not so crass or cynical. The paintings of Monet or Van Gogh the "stuff" if you will which they left behind preserve for us the artists ideas and personalities and could indeed be said to bring them to life for us, just as the written words of

countless authors throughout history may bring them and their ideas to life. A trunk of personal effects in the attic, a collection of tools passed on or even a favorite phrase when spoken may do the same for a departed Aunt or Grandfather. "Let the vittles stop your mouth" was a favorite of my great-grandfather Fitzgerald and it seems to bring some of his spirit back whenever I use the same phrase on my own children at the dinner table.

As stated in the title to this thesis Seven Panels on Preservation: Ruminations of a One-eyed Fat Man the underlying theme is preservation. The work presented here was done a time when my family had suffered within a short time, the loss of two of its most loved members and the creation of this imagery was in large part driven by the effect of that loss upon my life at the time. It is to their memory that I have dedicated this thesis.

II. About the Work

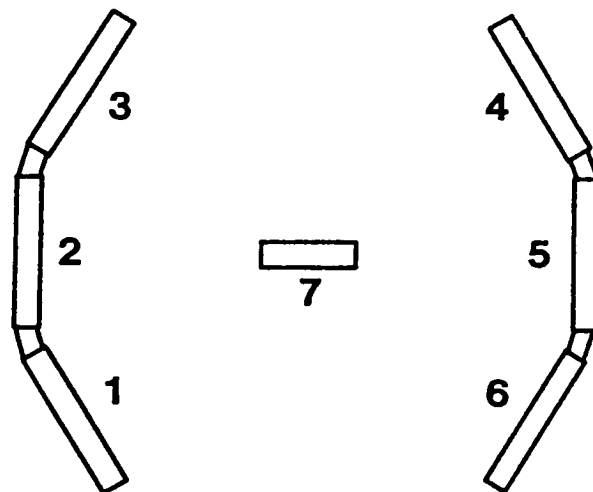
The work for this thesis consists of a series of seven panels or "windows" each being a separate concept or collection of thoughts on the topic of preservation. I refer to the panels as "windows" because the techniques used to produce this is a variation of the dalle de verre process used in stained glass work and because the intended use of the panels is architectural in nature, that is they are intended for installation in a wall and are double-sided, and in most cases do share some of the functions of a more traditional stained glass window.

These panels for the purposes of this thesis were displayed in the walls of a portable "room." The "room" was designed to allow the panels to be isolated from the rest of the gallery and presented in a enclosed space. This allowed the seven panels to be viewed and compared as a group. It is important that the panels be perceived in this fashion, as the panels each build on and/or refer to the ideas presented in the other panels. The portable room in which the seven panels were displayed, consisted of seven wall units, one for each window panel. Of the seven, six were large, being 40" wide x 96" high the seventh is considerably smaller measuring 24" wide by 5' in height. The six larger panels are joined together in two groupings of three panels each. Each group of panels being fastened together at a slight angle, so as to form a self-supporting shallow "U" shaped structure. The two

groupings of three panels were placed with the concave sides facing inward to form an irregular octagonal space. The small panel was placed in the center of the interior of this space. (See diagram below)

The effect of the arrangement of the two U shaped walls into the configuration shown is to isolate the interior space of the installation from the rest of the gallery, thus reinforcing the relationships of the panels as being each separate parts of a whole, and creating a more solemn setting in which the work may be viewed.

None of the panels in this series has an individual title. The title of the entire installation: Seven Panels on Preservation: Ruminations of a One-eyed Fat Man being the sole designation assigned by me to this work. So I will refer, for the purpose of convenience, to them as panels one through seven as presented here. The diagram below shows the respective location of each panel.



Additionally, the panels are grouped according to visual similarity and purpose. Panels one through three on the left side of the diagram, share an introductory function and present general concepts. The three panels on the left, panels four through six, elaborate on the concepts presented in the panels on the opposite side, and are more specific in content. The seventh panel located in the center serves both by appearance and content to bring the ideas of all the panels together.

All seven window panels are constructed using the basic techniques of traditional dalle de verre. A traditional dalle de verre window is composed of large roughly hewn chunks of dalle or slab glass imbedded in a matrix of poured concrete or epoxy. Likewise each of the windows which I have made were constructed using not only dalle glass, but also glass jars, pieces of mirror, bones as well as other found objects and constructed pieces. I will discuss the work as stained glass in a later section of this paper.

Window #1(Plate #4, page 36)

The image in this window consists of five mason jars of preserved food, in a single row, suspended in the epoxy background.

This panel serves an introductory function to present the idea of preservation and serves as a basis for other ideas brought up and explored in the other panels. The image is one

of double preservation--the food is preserved in the jars and the jars are in turn preserved as part of the panel, they can no longer be opened or used.

The ideas which are intended to be considered by these images are numerous:

--The importance of technology to our physical preservation. Canning, though now an old technology, is important as it allows for the stock pile of food against future scarcity and thereby insures our survival. It is an act of opposition to the forces of nature which would otherwise degrade the food.

--The food used in this panel is home-canned, which represents a willful act of opposition to nature and an act of individual responsibility for one's own well being. This is an important distinction when, with modern factory canning methods and our reliance more on prepared foods for our sustenance, the struggle against nature for food is, at best, an abstraction for most in this country.

--Canning of one's own food or other similar activities such as making wine are acts of faith that one will survive or one's children will survive to use that which is preserved. It is an acknowledgement of and preparation for the future.

--Metaphorically the panel speaks of individual responsibility for the preservation of one's beliefs, values or ideas against the forces which seek to collectivize or mute the voice of the individual. A technology such as canning or

sewing can be used as a means of independence from the reliance on factories if it is learned and practiced individually.

Window #2(Plate #5, page 37)

Like the first window the second is a collection of mason jars. This panel is larger and contains a total of nine jars each individually suspended in a smaller panel of epoxy and arranged on 3 rows of 3 jars each. The jars are held in place by a wooden framework which recalls the structure of a nine light window frame. Inside of each 3 jars are a variety of substances designed to give the impression this time not of preservation but of decay, spoilage, or putrefaction.

The function of this panel is to provide a contrast to the first by emphasizing the forces against which technologies and acts of preservation presented in the first panel are opposed.

These opposing ideas are:

--The irresistibility of the forces of nature--an attempt to permanently thwart the forces of nature must ultimately meet with defeat; here the substances despite being contained in the same protective jars seen in the first panel, have become degraded, spoiled. The technology has failed and the once protected goods are ruined.

--Metaphorically the panel contains a warning of the fallacy of the belief that man or his technologies can permanently thwart the actions of nature.

This panel is intended to evoke in the viewer a mostly visceral reaction. The same response of disgust/fascination which is felt when one encounters such things in day-to-day living; the mold on a loaf of bread or a piece of cheese left too long in the ice box, maggots on the corpse of a dead animal.

Window #3 (Plate #6, page 38)

In the design of the third window panel, I have again used the mason jars as the basic imagery in the panel, but unlike the first two panels this one differs in the shape of the panel. In this case its overall shape of the panel is of the simplified form of a house—a rectangular shape with a "gabled roof."

The placement of the six mason jars in two horizontal rows of three jars each, aligned vertically with each other make the jars suggestive of windows. Each of the mason jar windows, contain a preserved mouse.

Like the first two the images in this panel are intended to build upon those of the first two as well as refer to the other panels in the series.

The house shape can be taken as a reference once again to the use of man's technology in his struggle against nature. The mice may represent the agents of decay as suggested in the second panel.

Our dwellings on what preserve us against the onslaught of foul weather, the heat of the sun, the dampness and dark of

the night. The mouse through his habits of gnawing at the fabric of our houses, clothes, and furniture, and his consumption of our food, is as much a agent of decay as the fungus, mold, or insects which may also be at work against the structures of our houses.

But nature is slow and patient, wearing down things gradually, she has nothing on her side if not time. Disintegration of a house by decay is a slow almost abstract process, seldom apparent until a fairly late stage. The mouse is more easily engaged, because telltale signs; droppings in the bread bin where the cookies had been stored, holes gnawed in the base boards, shredded clothes in the attic reveal to us his presence. He is simply dealt with, by traps, poison, or engaging the services of a cat. But these will not remove him permanently others will follow, they always do.

The mice in the jars may also be food, as in the jars in the first panel. For a cat the mouse is certainly a source of food. And often they have been consumed by humans in times of shortage.

The mice in the "house" could also represent us. Ensconced safely in our houses, protected by our technologies. We can at least for a time, protect ourselves physically against the elements, but time is not on our side and ultimately we shall, like the mice, succumb to those forces and be subject ourselves to decay.

Window #4(Plate #7, page 39)

The fourth window is notably different from the first three in that it no longer makes use of the jars common to the first three. The image presented here is of a medicine cabinet and bathroom mirror. One side of the panel is occupied by a mirror, the other by a glass box having three shelves each being occupied by various objects commonly found in a medicine cabinet--toothbrushes, pill bottles, tubes of ointment, The image is in fact, the inside of a medicine cabinet.

Though the first three panels infer or make reference to the element of time, in this panel the main reference is to time as the medicine cabinet and its contents function as a time line. Each of the three shelves are meant to represent a stage in the life span of a person. From top to bottom respectively they are infancy, young adulthood, middle/old age. The objects arranged on each shelf were chosen to reflect the types of medications and cosmetics which are commonly used to see to our physical "preservation" throughout life. On the top shelf representing infancy are items relating to bodily function over which the infant has yet to gain control-- a nose syringe, diaper rash ointment, syrup of ipecac, etc. Additionally, there is aspirin for fevers and ointment for teething.

On the second shelf can be found mostly items used for the upkeep of ones's physical appearance. There are more items on this shelf than the one above it indicating an

increased need over time to combat the aging process. Most of the items on this shelf are cosmetic in nature-reflecting the need of someone whose body would be fully developed and generally functioning well but in need of constant improvement and maintenance-a comb, make-up, lipstick, etc. A box of aspirin, toothache ointment, a bridge, and a contact lens cleaning device also serve as harbingers of the future.

On the last shelf representing the advanced years of life the quantity of items has again increased. The cosmetics and personal grooming items from the previous shelf are now largely replaced with prescription medications, and other medical paraphernalia used to keep up a body which is by now generally in decline.

The mirror set next to the shelves in the panel serves to indicate to the viewer that the subject of this piece is actually himself. His image in the mirror invites one to contemplate his place on the shelves next door.

The obvious issue in this instance is preservation and beautification of ones physical being. It is something with which all in this country are obsessed. "Americans spend 2 billion dollars a year on nostrums to ward off aging, and billions more to disguise its effects with anything from hair dye to plastic surgery. Preserving youthfulness is a major preoccupation with Americans." (Beckwith et al. 1988, 50) But the effects of time and nature can only be temporarily held at bay. This recalls the same issue seen in Panel #2(Plate #5,

page 36) with its mason jars full of decaying matter.

Window #5(Plate #8, page 40)

Panel #4 and its concerns with the preservation of the physical is given contrast by the next panel. In this panel I have presented ten images of a cat. Nine of these images are painted on or etched onto 9 thick slabs of glass arranged in three rows of three below which is presented the skeletal remains of an actual cat. The skeletal remains of a bird appear where the cats stomach, if it still existed, would be located.

The number of glass panels in this window, 9, is a reference to the proverbial nine lives of the cat. These should be taken to represent nine memories or "lives" of the same cat, the cat whose remains appear at the bottom of this panel. It is through the memories of others that one exists beyond his physical death. Separate individuals would naturally have separate and distinct memories of someone known commonly to them and would vary according to the quality of whatever interaction that they had with that person, either positive or negative, pleasant, or unpleasant. To obtain an idea of the complete person one would have to combine all of these memories.

The images might also be of nine different cats-each one in fact was executed by a different individual with no specific direction from me other than a request for a picture of a cat. In this sense the image may be taken to be memories

of "catness" a whole to which each individual cat has contributed. In much the same way that each individual person contributes something to the totality of humanity for those who know him.

Several elements of the design of this panel make reference to the first three. The configuration of the nine pieces of glass recall the similar arrangement of those in panel #2 and offer a counter point to its message of inevitable destruction. The images of the cat suggest the cat's spirit, that which may be suggested by these physical artifacts (drawings), but is not necessarily embodied physically by them and is therefore impervious to the ravages of time.

Likewise the drawn images of the cats contrast the preserved remains of the actual mice in panel three. The drawings express much more of the life of this cat or any cat than can the lifeless bodies of the mice speak to us of their spirit or memories.

The element of food is also once again present in this panel through the bird in the skeletal cat's belly. This is a reference to panels one through three and is intended once again to remind one of the temporal nature of life, that the physical body despite the best efforts at preservation must ultimately come to ruin.

Window #6(Plate #9, page 41)

The sixth panel and the last one of the three that make

up this side of the display seeks to contrast the cyclical character of nature to the linear quality of man's technologies. Nature being represented by four seasonal images of an apple tree, going from blossoms in the spring through summer to fruition in the fall and dormancy in winter. A circular arrangement of the pieces of dalle glass in the background reiterate the cyclical character of nature's processes. A compartmentalized glass box in the bottom half of the panel shows the progressive "decay" of a watch. In the first compartment the watch is whole and by the fourth has disintegrated to rust and dirt.

The image of the watch may be taken in a number of ways. It could be representative of the life of a single man; the cradle to grave scenario such as that presented in the medicine cabinet. It was intended to be taken as a comparison of man's time (technology) to that of nature. Nature has no fixed notion of time nor any need to measure its passage-it persists inexorably into the future. Man and his technologies are but one facet of the natural process. All that we have, and our species itself will like the dinosaurs someday pass from existence and be transformed through nature's process of decay and regeneration into something new, a continuation of the issues first raised by the second panel.

Window #7(Plate #10, page 42)

The seventh and final window panel is placed in a separate, smaller, free-standing wall unit, located at the

center of the interior of the irregular octagon formed by the other wall units. This panel is somewhat smaller than the others and again makes use of the mason jars which were presented in the first three panels. The jar is set into the center of the panel and is flanked on either side by bones (a reference to the "cat" panel #5). Inside the mason jars are found several small objects, a pocket watch, false teeth, and a ring. The teeth and ring recall those famed in the medicine cabinet in panel #4, the watch the image of panel #6. The overall shape of this panel is reminiscent of a tombstone.

The purpose of this panel is to combine and relate the images of the first three panels with those of the second set of windows.

The tombstone shape and bones of this panel may be considered a reference to death, much as the cat skeleton in panel number five. More importantly, is its function as a reference point for preservation, indicated by the mason jar and its contents, the issue can be taken to be of the preservation of physical remains. A grave stone not only marks the location of whatever material remains there are of the body of the deceased, but becomes the last visible physical manifestation of that person to the world. The remains of the body not being accessible nor evident in any other way.

The jar and its objects may refer to the personal possessions of someone departed. Objects such as these may in

fact serve to perpetuate ones memories of someone deceased, if preserved by those to whom the objects are familiar. I, for instance, still use some of my great grandfather's and grandfather's woodworking tools, and have many pieces of furniture or household objects inherited from deceased family members all of which serve, at least for myself, to keep my memories of them alive. Like my friend's used clothes such objects may as well have some continued utility to others, having been purchased at an estate sale or auction. In this case the former owner is anonymous, but there are many markings which might serve to alert the new owner of his "ghost." Engraved names or phrases on old jewelry or watches, initials carved into the handles of tools, stains or repairs in old clothes, or even the pattern of wear and stretching in an old pair of shoes, peculiar to the foot which formed them, may all be small reminders of the existence they help to perpetuate.

The subjects of these works is obviously existential in nature. The images of food, decay, time, and memory are all intended to encourage in the viewer thoughts on the issues discussed above. But those are not necessarily all of the issues which may be derived from these images; neither is there a specific message or conclusion which the panels are intended to lead to. Rather I intended the panels to be each a separate thought on the subject, each contributing through itself and by comparison to the other panels to a further

understanding or greater degree of insight into a number of complex and often difficult subjects.

III. Background

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, the panels which comprise this work are essentially stained glass windows. Although very different in appearance, they are similar to more traditional windows in a number of ways. The panels are made using the traditional dalle de verre process. Dalle de verre windows (French for slabs or flagstones of glass) are made using large crudely cut slabs (dalles) of colored glass, arranged in a prescribed pattern and joined together in a matrix of concrete or an epoxy/silica mixture. Although dalle de verre is generally considered to be an invention of the 20th century its roots may be traced back as far as the mosaics of the byzantine era when occasionally the byzantine artist would "instead of imbedding the glass in stone, pierced the wall clear through and set in as window lights." (Lloyd 1961, 87) But the techniques as practiced today is largely an invention of 20th century stained glass artists such as Auguste Labauret and Pierre Chaudiere who in the 1920's while experimenting with various new architectural directions, revitalized the ancient techniques." (Lloyd 1961, 88) This was done by updating and expanding on them through the use of new materials especially concrete, which allowed for greater creativity possibilities. With concrete, the masonry could be poured around the glass pieces in a mold rather than setting the pieces into a masonry wall using traditional masonry practices. Contemporary dalle de verre

windows are usually made using an epoxy/silica mixture rather than concrete to bond the pieces together. It is this material I have used in preparing my work.

The "windows" or panels which I have made for this thesis all make use of this technique, except that in my work I have included many objects other than the traditional dalle glass pieces. Of all the panels in this series, panel number five the "cat" panel displays the greatest use of traditional dalle glass, although I have also used it in panels #3, 6, and 7 also. Most of the imagery in the panels is in the form of various found objects embedded in the epoxy such as mason jars, bones, boxes, etc. It was the possibility of combining the found objects and traditional methods which attracted me to the process.

One of the traditional functions of stained glass windows in churches, the largest patrons of the glazier's craft, has been the illustration of stories of the bible and other tenets of Christian faith. During the days of the Middle Ages, when many of the churches faithful would have been illiterate and books were at best rare, the informational content of the stained glass would have been especially important. Likewise the primary intention of the imagery in my work is largely informational, the formal purely visual concerns of their composition being secondary.

Also, like stained glass windows, in terms of display, the intended use of my work is architectural. They are

intended to be installed in a window or wall opening as a permanent piece of a structure. Thus the need for the portable "room" in which these pieces were displays at RIT's Bevier gallery.

As I have pointed out above, one of the chief differences between my work on this series and the traditional use of the dalle de verre process is my inclusion of objects other than glass into the compositions. Through the use of these found objects I am able to present information and issues in a very direct way. How better to present an abstract issue such as preservation than with actual preserved food, decay with decomposing matter, death with the deceased remains of a formerly living creature? The medicine cabinet (Window #4) is a particularly clear example because of the inclusion of the actual contents of a medicine cabinet. Its similarity to the medicine cabinets, which are part of almost everyone's daily experience, allow for a direct reference and impression which would be more difficult to achieve by other means of presentation, for example a drawing or photograph.

The use of such objects in the making of art has, since the "Readymades" of Marcel Duchamp in the second decade of this century, become commonplace. My use of these objects though is quite different from their use by Duchamp whose readymade pieces expressed the idea of art as a process of selection. His pieces becoming art through his intervention and by removing the object from the world and presenting it in

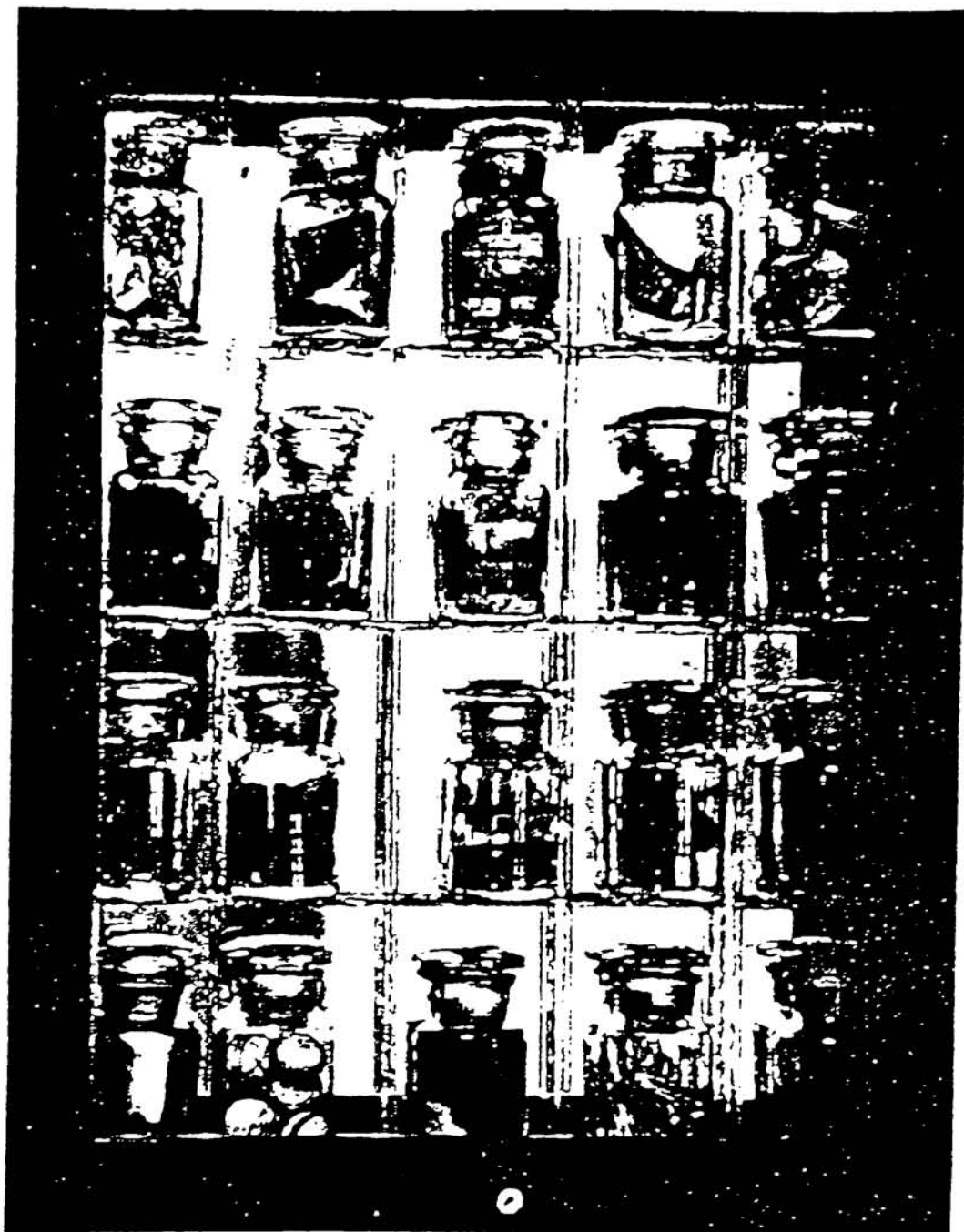
a museum or gallery setting. My interest is in the objects' for their evocative qualities, for their association to our everyday lives and experiences in a world filled with objects. In this, as well as other respects, my use of the found objects is closer in concept to the work of the American surrealist Joseph Cornell.

My work is comparable to Cornell's in two ways. Like Cornell, I construct my work using a variety of found objects, many of which are similar to the types of objects he would use-bottles, watches, small household objects. In his aviary series, begun in 1941, Cornell used images of birds, usually cut out pictures or illustrations. Similarly in my work I have incorporated the mice, the cat, and bird, though these are actual mice, an actual cat and bird skeleton. The images of the cats painted on the glass panels in panel #5 may be considered to be the equivalent of a "found" image of a cat in that I "collected" them from various individuals, who executed them at my request. The nature of my request to those who contributed was only for a drawing of a cat, without any other specific instructions from me, and without knowledge of the end use of the image. The cat images are thus not something which I controlled and that I consider as "found."

The boxes which I used in panel #4 The Medicine Cabinet (Plate #7) and those in panel #6 (Plate #9) are especially reminiscent of Cornell's work which mostly took the form of boxes in which his objects were placed and organized. Works

like Cornell's "pharmacy" (1943), a collection of bottles containing various found elements set in a glass box, (photo page 23) are recalled not only by the bottles of the medicine cabinet piece but also by the arrangement of mason jars in panels 1, 2, or 3.

More important than the physical similarities of my work to Cornell's though is the similarity of my intent, in executing the work. As I have stated previously the panels are intended to be informational in nature, their purpose being to supply me with a point or points of departure for my thoughts on a particular subject in this case-preservation, in both the physical and spiritual manifestations. Although Cornell is usually grouped in with the surrealists because of the physical similarity in imagery to theirs, in most respects the similarities of their work ends there. The surrealists were interested in dreams and the realm of the unconscious. Cornell was a Christian Scientist who sought through his work to explore and illustrate the "metaphysical ontology of Christian Science as it appears in life, the natural sciences, humanities and the arts." (Starr 1982, 1) He was "first and foremost a metaphysical scientist and religious philosopher who used *art as a means rather than an aesthetic end.*" (Starr 1982, 1) Cornell was interested in Surrealism only to the extent that it "was involved in the pursuit of an absolute reality lying beyond the domain of conventional modes of perception." (Starr 1982, 3) To the Christian Scientist



Joseph Cornell. *Pharmacy* (1943)

"matter and conventional perception of it are costumes which disguise the reality of Being or Spirit".(Starr 1982, 2) He was, through his work attempting to prove the tenets of Christian Science and to understand the absolute truth or reality. Although I am not a Christian Scientist, my use of this work as a means of exploration of the abstract and ambiguous issue which surround the subject of this work seem remarkably similar. Like Cornell my selection of objects, their placement within a composition, and their relation to each other, was based on meanings associated with specific objects or types of objects, and the ability of the objects to provoke thought on the subject inherent in each panel, and to have the viewer draw comparisons to the subjects and concepts provoked by other panels in the series. The work in this way is not a conclusive statement on the subject but proposes an open discussion, into which the viewer is invited to join.

Interestingly, Cornell's work is remarkably similar to stained glass windows of the Middle Ages in a similar way. Equally or perhaps even more important than the imagery and symbols found in stained glass was the element of light. In the design of the cathedrals, light was endowed with certain metaphysical properties, being associated with the divine or spiritual, having "an analogical relationship to the divine light illuminating the divine city." (Harries, 1968, 10) The creation of the gothic style in architecture and stained glass were largely due to the influence of Abbot Suger at St.

Denis, France. Suger saw "the stained-glass window as a visual 'demonstration' of Dionysian theology...These translucent panels, 'vested' as he put it, with sacred symbols, (were) to him like veils at once shrouding and revealing the ineffable." (Harries, 1968, 10) Dionysian theology is based on the writings of the fifth century writer, Dionysius, "who held that visible things mirror the light of god." (Lee, 1976, 68) "Dionysius describes the hierarchy of beings as a cascade of light. Creation is a gift of light. To the extent creatures share in divine being they are illuminated by the divine light. (Harries, 1968, 10)

Thus the medieval stained glass window, through its combination of symbols and light sought to evoke the absolute truth and beauty of the divine, as "an imitation of the splendors of the Heavenly Jerusalem, giving man a foretaste of the pleasures of the blessed." (Harries, 1968, 6) Both Cornell and Suger were using their particular art in a similar pursuit of absolute reality which lies beyond the normal means of human experience.

As is the case with any stained glass window, my pieces all rely upon transmitted light to achieve maximum visual impact. Particularly the second panel with its mason jars each isolated in its own compartment. This panel appears quite dark and lifeless unless lit strongly from behind, where upon each jar lights up in its compartment. The cylindrical jars seem to hold onto the light, which is modified and

colored in varying degrees by the contents of the jars particularly the liquids. Likewise the mouse panel works very well when lit from behind. The first panel, with the jars of preserved food of all the panels, transmits the least light, but the little that does come through around the edges and top of the jars adds considerably to the appearance of the panel. Of the remaining panels, the cat panel #5 (plate#8) and panel #6 (plate #9) have each have a good quantity of dalle glass in them and so need a good deal of transmitted light. The mason jar which is the focal point of panel #6 floats eerily in the black void of the tombstone shape of the panel when lit strongly from behind, balanced only by the small chunks of blue and purple dalle glass glowing faintly above it.

The only one of the windows which would seem not to require the benefit of transmitted light, is panel #4, the "medicine cabinet." All of the objects in this panel are plainly visible in reflected light, but take on a decidedly more surreal appearance when lit from behind.

When this work was set up in the Bevier Gallery at RIT the only lighting available was artificial and necessarily less intense than daylight and so none of the panels could not be observed to cast the colored patches of light upon the surfaces of the room as is characteristic of stained glass. I was happy to observe that each of these panels does do so when propped in the sunlit windows of my studio at home.

IV. Notes on Process

A. Conceptual Processes

I feel it appropriate that I should discuss briefly my thought process by which this work was developed, and one or two of the technical aspects of the making of my work for this series of panels.

I have for sometime previous to making this series of panels, used found objects in my work. I believe that the attraction of the found objects is in the ability, through inclusion in a work of art, to illicit a reaction in the viewer which would be impossible to achieve through a representation of the same object. The jars of preserved mice and the cat skeleton are an obvious example of this.

This series of panels began with the Cat Panel (plate #8). At the time which I came upon the cat skeleton I had for some time been considering the subject of death and remembrance due to the recent deaths within my family. The idea for the design of this panel remained unchanged from the way it was originally conceived. The basic topic of the Cat Panel, the idea of physical versus mental remains (memories) of someone deceased suggested to me the general theme of preservation from which I then developed the images and subjects of the other panels. I have on page 43 reproduced the original sketch in which I laid out my ideas for the series of panels and their relationships.

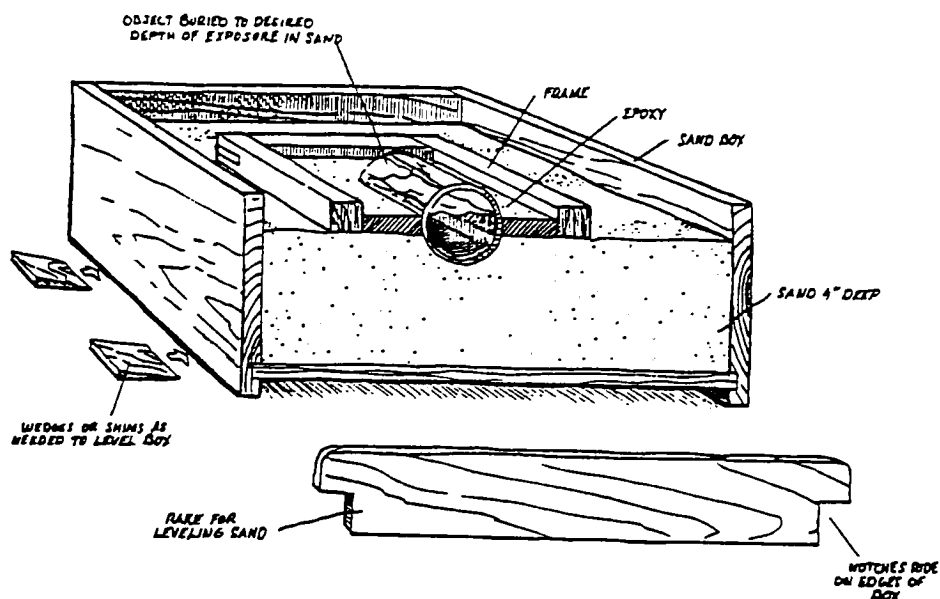
After the Cat Panel, I created the panel which I have

previously referred to as panel #1, the one with the jars of preserved food. The jars of food seemed a logical way to introduce the topic of preservation. The jars contain food, which serves to preserve our bodily health, they are themselves preserved-a suggestion of men's intervention through technology to insure his own preservation. The concepts for the other panels proceed from there, the second and third panels exploring the idea of decay-the forces to which preservation is opposed. Panels 4 through 7 serve to compare/contrast the first three (as well as each other) to the issue as they relate to human existence.

The original conception of the panels was to have them as freestanding units with legs or bases attached. This was due to the absence of any actual window opening or architectural setting for which the windows were being designed. However, the use of such devices would have changed the reference point of the panels from windows to sculptural objects. In consideration of this problem, I eventually decided on the portable walls in order to afford the proper architectural frame of reference as well as to allow for proper lighting of the panels. The "room" created by the walls when set up, bore an environment in which the work could be viewed as a whole, and the panels easily compared to one another. This arrangement lent the work a feeling of solemnity which would otherwise have been lacking using legs or forms with bases.

B. Technical Processes

In so far as the physical construction of the panels is concerned, I used the traditional methods of making dalle de verre panels, which as this process is described in detail in a number of books such as The Stained Glass Association of America Reference and Technical Manual, Second Edition pages 194 to 234, does not bear repetition here. The only innovation, which I added to the basic process, involved inventing a method by which the three dimensional objects jars, boxes, bones, etc. could be cast centered, into the panels. I accomplished this by pouring the panels in a wooden frame set atop the surface of a sandbox, having previously buried the objects partially in the sand. To achieve a panel of uniform thickness it was necessary to carefully level the sandbox and rake the surface of the sand perfectly level prior to placing the frames in place. The following illustration shows the method.



This method worked well for most applications but became troublesome when pouring the panels including the skeletons especially that of the cat. This is because while arranging the cat bones for the opposite side of the panel (that which is against the surface of the sand box) it was necessary to almost completely bury the bones except for the small portion of which would actually be encased in the epoxy. This made placement and alignment difficult. This and the thickness of the poured panel, which would not allow small bones to show on both surfaces accounts for the differences between the "complete" skeleton on one side and the partial one on the other. To make the skeleton on the second side of the panel as complete in appearance as the first would have required a second set of bones.

I should also note that I did have some trouble with breakage of the mason jars during the first year after the panels were made. This occurred in two instances both on the same window panel #2 within the jars containing decayed matter. The breakage may have been due to a differential in the coefficient of expansion between the glass and the epoxy. However, I suspect the build up of pressure within the bottle due to fermentation or some similar process of decay was the cause. Because I have had no further breakage since replacing the substances within the jars with inert substitutes, I believe this to be the cause. Also the jars of panel #1 with

preserved food, panel #3 with the mice, and panel #8 have displayed no similar tendencies.

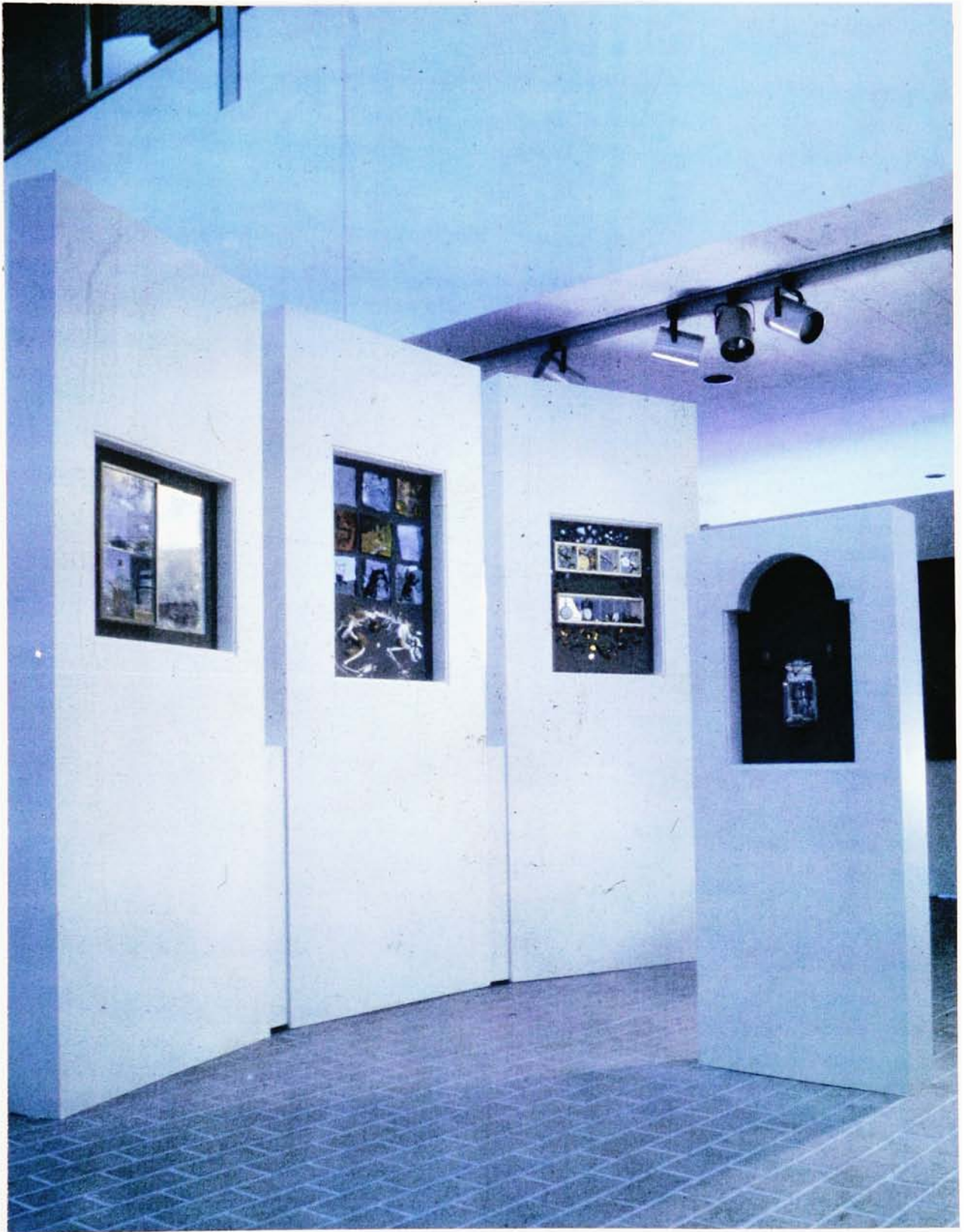
SEVEN PANELS ON PRESERVATION:
RUMINATIONS OF A ONE-EYED FAT MAN
PHOTOS



Installation as set up in Bevier Gallery at RIT



Installation as set up in Bevier Gallery at RIT



Installation as set up in Bevier Gallery at RIT



Plate #4
Window Panel #1



Plate #5
Window Panel #2

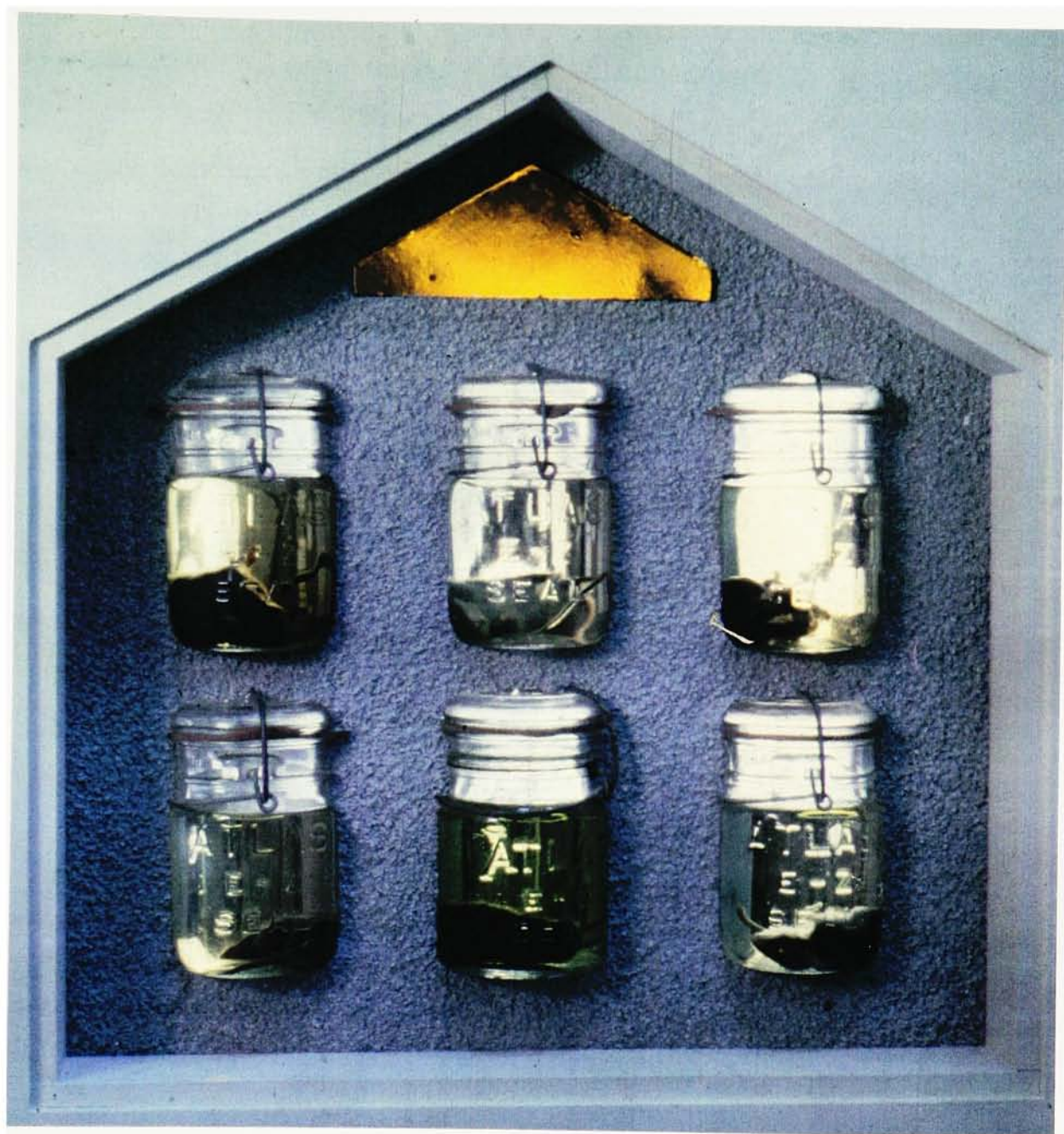


Plate #6
Window Panel #3



Plate #7
Window Panel #4



Plate #8
Window Panel #5



Plate #9
Window Panel #6

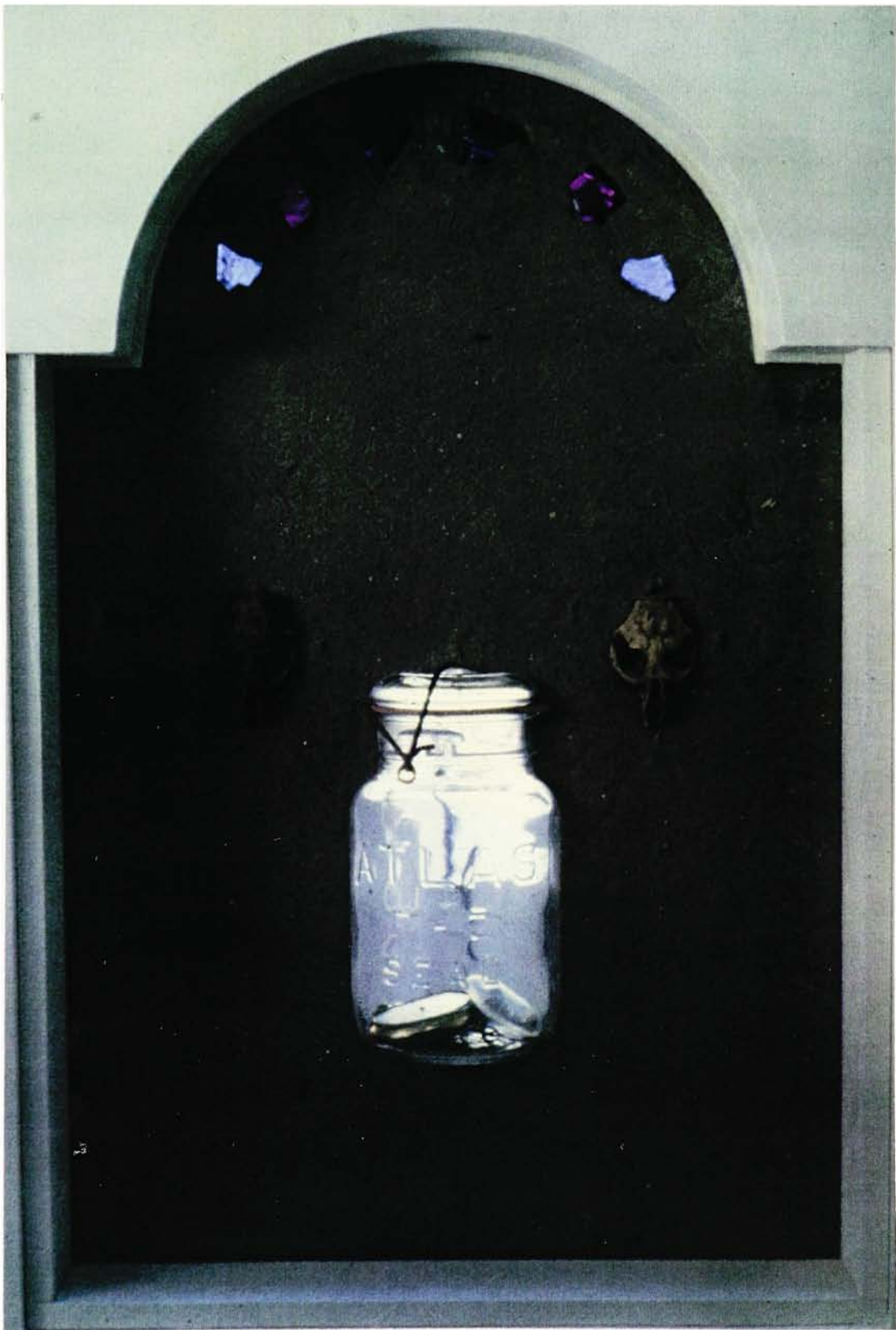
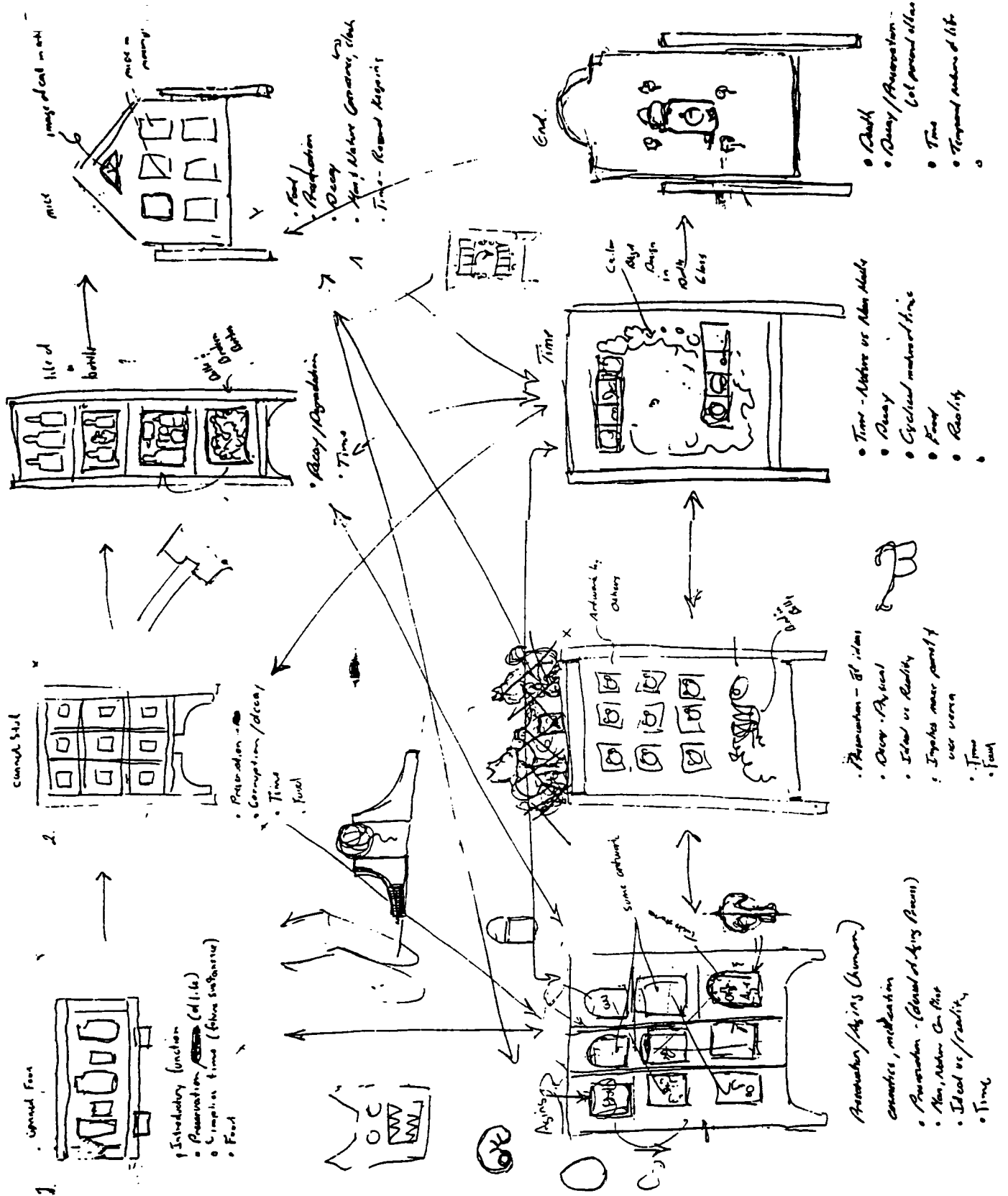


Plate #10
Window Panel #7



Preliminary Sketch

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